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The Education of Hispanics in the United States Today:
Illustrative Findings

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The Education of Hispanics in The United States Today: Illustrative Findings

Background Data

a Hispanics constituted 6.4 percent of the total (226.33) population of the US in 1980. The Bureau estimates that there were about 14.9 million Hispanics in March 1980, excluding Puerto Rico's 3.5 million. Well over half, or about 9 million, of all Hispanics in 1980 were of Mexican origin; 2 million were of Puerto Rican origin; under 1 million were of Cuban origin; and 3 million were of Other Spanish origin.

b Hispanics are the second largest US minority and the fastest growing. Experts conclude that Hispanics could number over 47 million and comprise 13 percent of the population by the year 2020, displacing Blacks as the country's largest minority.

c Hispanic dispersal throughout the US is extensive. But the most dramatic growth is occurring in metropolitan areas and the Sun Belt, from Florida, to Texas to California, and from Illinois to Massachusetts. The growth areas of the country, in fact, often coincide with major areas of Hispanic growth. New York, California and Texas account for 40 percent of the Hispanic population, and in California and Texas the Hispanic population exceeds the Black population.

d The Hispanic population is the most metropolitan of all groups in the country with the exception of Asians.

e Hispanics were more likely than non-Hispanics to live in central cities. For instance, in 1980, one half of all Hispanics resided in the central cities of metropolitan areas compared with slightly less than one-third of non-Hispanics.

f Hispanics are young. In 1980, the median age of Hispanics was only 23 years, compared to 31 for non-Hispanics. Puerto Rican and Mexican origin persons are extremely young populations with median ages of about 22 years.

c On the average, the income levels of Hispanic families were lower than those for non-Hispanic families.

c Overall, the changes during the last 10 years in the income and poverty levels of Hispanics were not encouraging. Hispanic families experienced a substantial decrease of about 14 percent in real median family income.

c Unemployment, underemployment and employment in the less desirable sectors of the occupational structure further diminish the Hispanic capacity to secure adequate education for its youth.

c Discrimination is an important cause of Hispanic difficulties in the job market. According to research conducted by the National Commission for Employment Policy, Hispanics are penalized more in the work force because of their lack of fluent English than are non-Hispanics with equivalent lack of fluency.

Educational Findings

More than ever, the frailty of Hispanic gains in education are being confronted by an adverse condition that presently detracts from past advances. The evidence is the condition of Hispanic education is acute:

a School enrollment data show three trends in the education of Hispanics: (1) Hispanic children enrolled in school at rates lower than those for non-Hispanic students, (2) they fall behind their classmates in progressing through school, and (3) their attrition rates are higher than for non-Hispanic students. These trends begin early, and underenrollment contributes to high school graduation rates for Hispanics that are lower than those for non-Hispanics.

a In 1982, 58 percent of young Hispanic adults (25 to 34 years old) were high school graduates, compared to only 43 percent in 1970. This improvement also appears in the proportions of college graduates, which was 18 percent in 1982 but only 9 percent in 1970. Yet despite these gains, Hispanics have not reached the level of non-Hispanics. In 1982, 88 percent of young non-Hispanic adults were high school graduates and 25 percent had completed 4 years or more of college.

• A cluster of related findings indicates that Hispanic students are more poorly prepared for college than non-Hispanic White students. (1) A higher percentage of Hispanic seniors are in vocational or general programs than academic programs. (2) Fewer Hispanics seniors than other Whites have enrolled in academic courses that lead to college. (3) A higher percentage of Hispanics than non-Hispanic Whites take neither the SAT nor the ACT, the standardized tests usually necessary for college admission.

• In all but two of the 25 largest public school systems, more than half the students come from minority groups. In Los Angeles, close to half the public enrollment is Hispanic and in New York more than one quarter is.

• While public school enrollment declined 15 percent between 1970 and 1981, elementary and secondary enrollments rose in five states, including three with substantial Hispanic populations: Arizona, Texas and Florida. Hispanic students accounted for 8 percent of the total enrollment nationally, but accounted for a much larger proportion of total enrollment in New Mexico (44 percent), Texas (38 percent), California (33 percent), Arizona (34 percent), and Colorado (35 percent). With 22 percent, New York was the only other state with more than 10 percent Hispanic enrollment.

• Between 1975 and 1980 the number of Hispanic enrollment in college as a percent of high school graduates declined 3.3 percent, from 23.4 percent to 19.8 percent, while whites dropped by only .2 and blacks declined by 4.2 percent.

• Hispanic college enrollments as a percent of the 18-24 year old population fell from 20.4 percent in 1973 to 18.1 percent in 1980.

• Although 1980 Hispanic full-time enrollments in both public and private institutions in the 50 states and DC have increased since 1970, there has been a decline of Hispanic students as a percent of the whole Hispanic population.

• While 34.4 percent of white students went to four-year colleges, over half of all Hispanic students were enrolled in community colleges.

* The lack of educational attainment among Hispanics before high school completion is illustrated by the increase in dropout rate. In 1973 the dropout rate was 41 percent and by 1988 it had increased to 49 percent, compared with a 13 percent dropout rate that decreased to 23 for Blacks, and an 18 percent dropout rate that remained constant for Whites during the same period.

* In California, Mexican-Americans dropout of high school at twice the average state dropout rate. Overall, the 1990 high school completion rate for Mexican-Americans 24 and above was 43.3 percent, compared with 68.7 percent for Whites.

* According to State Senator Beck, between 10 and 75 percent of the Hispanic high school students are failing to graduate from high school in Illinois.

* In 1980-81, Hispanics made up 31 percent of the total student body of the NYC public schools making it the fastest growing segment of the school population in recent years. Between 1974-75 and 1980-81 it increased 10.3 percent, compared to a Black student increase of 1.4 percent and a decline of all others of 4.3 percent. [NYC]

* Hispanics displayed the highest dropout rates (80 percent) from the 7th to the 12th grades compared to Blacks (73 percent) and Whites (38 percent).

* For each group, the dropout rate in NYC was more than double that of upstate. For Hispanics it went from 29 percent upstate to 60 percent in NYC; for Blacks, from 39 to 72 percent; and for Whites, 14 to 30 percent.

* The overall unemployment rate in NYC for youth 16-21 of age who are dropouts rose over the last decade from 34 percent in 1970 to 75 percent in 1980.

* According to a 1984 report by New York's State Education Department:

- Hispanics had statewide the highest dropout rate for the class of 1983 (42 percent as compared with 32 percent for Whites and 33 percent for Blacks).

* Hispanics in 1980-81 had the lowest percentage of enrollments and college graduates (bachelor's degree) in the scientific fields.

* The lack of minorities in the licensed professions was attributed by the same New York's Regents Report to the following factors:

* Limited ACCESS to professional career options among minority students.

* Inadequate COUNSELING at stages of education when critical decisions are made.

* Lack of ASPIRATION resulting from the above two feelings, language difficulties and self-image problems.

* Lack of minority professional ROLE MODELS.

* LOW EXPECTATIONS of minority children, contributing to poor self-image, lower aspirations, and lower achievement levels.

* Inadequate training in FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS - especially math, science and English.

* Insufficient opportunities for SPECIAL HELP, tutoring, and remediation.

* Inflexible or insensitive ADMISSIONS procedures in professional programs.

* Inadequate steps to promote RETENTION through planning and provision for special help during high school and professional study.

* Lack of adequate FUNDING to implement programs aimed at increasing minority participation.

* Lack of INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT to affirmative action.

"The Issue of Education"

The correlation between education and socioeconomic position is a well-established one. Current projections say

that during the 1980's the labor force is going to decline, growing at less than half the rate at which it grew during the 1970's. But the Hispanic combination of younger-than-average population and a high birthrate indicates there will be a growing supply of new labor from this group during the 1980's. Still, this growth, coupled with demand for labor, will not necessarily help to reduce the disproportionately high unemployment among Hispanic groups because, in contrast with the trend for Whites, the percentage of teenage teenagers and young adults in the labor force will show little if any decline.

The United States ranked second among industrial nations in the "measured skill endowment" of its labor force in 1980 but by 1995 is had dropped to seventh place. Since growth in productivity is related to increasing skills of workers, education and training are central to meeting the changing employment needs of the Eighties and increasing the nation's productivity growth rate.

Workers who, for whatever reason, are unprepared to take what are more often highly paid white-collar positions will in the future have fewer blue-collar positions from which to choose. This poses a potential problem of polarization and, to the extent it occurs, is a very serious problem for Hispanics. A potential "technological gap" could thus preclude a substantial part of the population from participating in the more rewarding aspects of the work revolution that many foresee. Especially Hispanics. This is not to mention the productivity losses to the nation as well.

Educational decisions made today will affect this outcome to the benefit or the detriment of Hispanic youth. The record does not suggest that head-brush approaches to secondary school problems address the fine points of Hispanic needs. Confronted with the demands of a new kind of society, what Maschke has called the Information Society, creative and innovative strategies have to be developed.

*Taken from a background paper prepared for the National Commission on Secondary Schooling for Hispanics, 1983.